

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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E.O. 11652: NA

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SUBJECT: LIFE RETURNS TO COLOMBIAN POLITICAL SCENE

1. SUMMARY: WITH THE END OF THE LONG YEAR-END HOLIDAY SEASON AND THE RETURN OF MOST POLITICIANS TO THEIR DUTIES, POLITICAL ACTIVITY RESUMED

ON ALL FRONTS. THE INITIAL SHARPLY CRITICAL REACTIONS TO THE US TRADE LAW BEGAN TO BE BALANCED BY MORE PONDERED COMMENTS, WHICH TOOK INTO GREATER ACCOUNT COLOMBIA'S SELF INTEREST. THE SPLIT IN THE LIBERAL PARTY NATIONAL DIRECTORATE (DLN) WHICH HAD PARALYZED IT WAS HEALED, AND THAT BODY BEGAN TO FUNCTION. THE LABOR MINISTERS REMARKS TO A REPORTER WHICH SEEMED TO LINK AMERICAN INFLUENCE TO ILLEGAL STRIKES RECEIVED NO FOLLOW-UP, AND LEFT UNION LEADERS PUZZLED. THE POSSIBILITY OF A NATIONWIDE BANK STRIKE AGAIN LOOMED. END SUMMARY.

2. REACTION TO US TRADE BILL.

THE SIGNING OF THE US TRADE BILL WAS IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWED BY HEAVILY UNFAVORABLE EDITORIAL AND POLITICAL COMMENT. (BOGOTA 0208).

HOWEVER, BY WEEKS END THE BALANCE HAD SHIFTED TO A SOMEWHAT MORE THOUGHTFUL AND MODERATE REACTION AS TEMPER COOLED AND
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EXPLANATIONS PREVIOUSLY GIVEN BY THE AMBASSADOR AND OTHER MISSION

PERSONNEL CAUSED COLOMBIANS TO REALIZE THAT NOT ONLY WERE THEIR TRADE INTERESTS NOT DAMAGED BY THE BILL BUT THAT THEY COULD ACUTALLY BENEFIT BY IT. OPPOSITION TO THE TRADE BILL HAD AN IRONIC AND POSSIBLY USEFUL

BY PRODUCT: A REMINDER THAT THE OAS COULD CONTINUE TO BE A VALUABLE FORUM IN WHICH TO DEFEND REGIONAL INTERESTS. COLOMBIA SUPPORTED VENEZUELA INITIATIVE TO DISCUSS IN THE OAS THE EFFECTS OF THE TRADE BILL IN LATIN AMERICA. THIS REMINDER MAY BE ESPECIALLY SIGNIFICANT AT A TIME WHEN COLOMBIA IS STUDYING THE QUESTION OF UNILATERAL RENEWAL OF CUBAN RELATIONS (BOGOTA 11378).

3. DLN RESUSCITATED.

ON JAN 7 PRESIDENTIAL DESIGNADO JULIO CESAR TURBAY IMPOSED A SOLUTION OF THE DLN CRISIS BY CONVOKING THAT BODY FOR ITS FIRST MEETING SINCE IT WAS CONSTITUTED IN AUGUST 1974. THREE OF ITS EIGHT MEMBERS HAD REFUSED TO PARTICIPATE OVER THE ISSUE OF THE MANNER IN WHICH SENATOR GERMAN ZEA HAD BEEN ELECTED AS PRESIDENT. AT THE MEETING OF THE DLN ZEA PRESENTED HIS RESIGNATION AS PRESIDENT, WHEREUPON HE WAS RECONFIRMED IN HIS POSITION BY THE DLN. THE QUESTION OF PRINCIPLE THAT DLN MATTERS SHOULD BE DECIDED BY CONSENSUS RATHER THAN MAJORITY VOTE WAS THUS SETTLED, AT LEAST TO THE SATISFACTION OF THE DISSIDENTS. THE LIBERAL EL EXPECTADOR UNDOUBTEDLY VOICED THE FEELINGS OF THE LIBERAL PARTY MAINSTREAM IN AN EDITORIAL ON JAN 9 WHICH CHIDED THE DISSIDENTS FOR SUBJECTING THE PARTY AND THE GOVERNMENT TO A MONTHS LONG LOSS OF POLITICAL COORDINATION AND MOMENTUM FOR "SUPERFICIAL" AND "FUTILE" REASONS. IN FACT, THE SPLIT WAS NOT DUE TO ANY DIFFERENCES OF POLICY OR IDEOLOGY, OR EVEN OBJECTION TO ZEA PERSONALLY, BUT WAS PRIMARILY A RESULT OF THE THWARTED AMBITION OF ONE OF THE DISSIDENTS, SENATOR GUSTAVO BALCAZAR, AT NOT GETTING THE JOB. THE LIBERAL PARTY NOW HAS A FULL-TIME DIRECTIVE BODY WHICH SHOULD STRENGTHEN THE UNITY AND PURPOSE OF THE PARTY IN THE MONTHS AHEAD.

4. THE DLN ALSO DECIDED TO POSTPONE INDEFINITELY THE LIBERAL PARTY CONVENTION WHICH HAD BEEN SCHEDULED FOR FEB 1. A CONVENTION WILL PROBABLY BE HELD IN JULY (BOGOTA 0062).

5. MINISTER DE CROVOS REMARKS FIND NO ECHO.

ON JAN 5, EL TIEMPO REPORTED MINISTER OF LABOR DE CROVOS REMARKS IMPLYING US INFLUENCE IN RECENT STRIKES IN COLOMBIA (BOGOTA LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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0098).

NOTHING FURTHER HAS BEEN HEARD FROM THE MINISTER ON THIS SUBJECT. SUBSEQUENTLY, UNION OF COLOMBIAN WORKERS (UTC) PRESIDENT TULIO CUEVAS TOLD THE EMBASSY HE WAS MORE PUZZLED THAN CONCERNED ABOUT THE MINISTERS

REMARKS. UNIONS AFFILIATED WITH EITHER THE UTC OR THE COLOMBIAN WORKERS

CONFEDERATION (CTC) CUEVAS SAID HAVE NOT ENGAGED IN ANY RECENT STRIKE

ACTIVITIES. AND BESIDES, HE ADDED BOTH CONFEDERATIONS ENJOY EXCELLENT RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE MINISTER AND THE LOPEZ GOVERNMENT. HE DID NOT THINK THE MINISTER'S REMARKS WERE DIRECTED TOWARDS AIFLD. INFORMED OF THE MINISTER'S PIQUE OVER ERRONEOUSLY BELIEVING SHE HAD BEEN DENIED A VISA TO THE US (BOGOTA 11295) VUEVAS THOUGHT THIS THE MOST LIKELY CAUSE OF THE MINISTER'S OUTBURST. HE OBSERVED THAT THE MINISTER IS A NOTABLY VOLATILE PERSON.

6. STRIKE ACTIVITIES.

EMPLOYEES OF THE BANCO GANDERO BEGAN A STRIKE JAN 8, WHICH BY WEEKS END HAD NOT BEEN SETTLED. THE GOC DECLARED THE STRIKE ILLEGAL. HOWEVER, UNLIKE THE PROCEDURES USED IN THE STRIKE OF THE GOC DID NOT FREEZE UNION FUNDS, SUSPEND THE UNIONS LEGAL STATUS, OR AUTHORIZE THE BANK MANAGEMENT THE RIGHT TO FIRE STRIKE LEADERS, THUS HOPING TO AVOID A THREATENED SYMPATHY STRIKE BY UNIONS IN SEVERAL OTHER STATE BANKS. THE BANK WORKERS STRIKES LED BY THE MAOIST REVOLUTIONARY AND INDEPENDENT WORKERS MOVEMENT (MOIR) PROBABLY HAVE A POLITICAL, ANTI-GOVERNMENT OVERTONE. NEVERTHELESS, ADDITIONAL STRIKES IN THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTORS BY PRO AS WELL AS ANTI-GOVERNMENT UNIONS MAY BE EXPECTED DURING THE YEAR AS CONTRACTS RUN OUT, AND AS UNFAVORABLE ECONOMIC CONDITIONS CREATE THE CLIMATE FOR HARDER BARGAINING.

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